DONALD ROSS OF HEIMRA

BY WILLIAM BLACK

Mary Stanley having inherited from an uncle a Highland estate in Scotland, Lochgarra, visits it, accompanied by a young lady friend and her factor, Mr. Purdie, with the secret intention of reforming every abuse in its management. The first tenant she meets gruffly complaining of a tax added to the rent paid by the crofters for a dike built to protect their land from floods, she declares it abolished. The evening after taking possession of Castle Heimra she resolves that half of that tax, which had been collected for thirty years, shall be restored to the crofters.

Purdie, dining with Miss Stanley and her companion, over the wine discloses his peculiar bitterness toward the tenants of the estate. He tells how, at his instigation, that young lady's late uncle drained the loch and tore down the castle in revenge because the natives would not recognize changes in their names corresponding with their changed ownership.

Donald Ross, the owner of the remnant of the Heimra estate, one tiny island, arrives off the coast in his yacht Sirene, manned by two trusty Highlanders. Waiting for night to fall he lands by the light of the stars his little cargo of smuggled French brandy and stows it in "The Cave of the Crowing Cock." His men inform him that some young crofters are ready at his word to cause the obnoxious factor to be killed by some seeming accident. He warns them against so dangerous a crime.

Mary, unattended, taking an early morning walk, muses on the stories of young Donald's wildness, and encounters a pretty, simple Highland girl, who answers her greeting in Gaelic, trustfully pats her hand, but runs off when she sees the factor approaching. She resolves to learn that language. After a day spent in interrogating tenants, all of whom grumble about everything else, but maintain a mysterious silence on the subject of rent, she observes a man poaching for salmon on the stream at twilight whom she divines to be Donald Ross.

Mary and her companion, Katchen, taking lunch, make a day's tramp over her estates, encountering uniform distrust, sullenness and reticence in her tenants. Caught in a driving rain they are bewildered and nearly swallowed up in a bog. They are rescued and led to the shelter of a cottage by a young man—Donald Ross—who without giving his name departs and sends Mary's maid and carriage for her.

CHAPTER VI.

GILLEASBUIG MOR.

Kathchen was standing at the window, looking out upon the wild and wayward sea, that was all brilliantly dappled with sun and cloud, while Mary was at her dressing table, preparing to go down to breakfast. It was a blowy and blusterous morning, after the storm; but the welcome sunlight was abroad again; and the heavens shone serene and fair.

"Never, no more," Kathchen was solemnly remarking, as she regarded the wide plain of hurrying waves and the white sea-birds that dipped and sailed and circled in the light, "never no more shall I have a word to say against smuggled brandy. By rights, Mary, you and I ought both to be in a raging fever this morning; and you look as well as ever you did in your life, and I have only a little bit of a headache. Nor against poaching—I have nothing to say against poaching—when it suddenly produces somebody to get you out of a hideous and horrible morass, worse than any quicksand that I ever heard of. Do you know, I hardly dared put my foot to the floor this morning—I was afraid that frightful sensation would come back, as if I were standing on nothing, and just about to sink. Wasn't it terrible? I know I shall dream about it to my dying day." And then she said:—"I wonder what took young Ross of Heimra up to that out-of-the-way place? Not poaching; for he had neither rod nor gun."

"More likely selling brandy to that old woman," said Mary; and then she added, with a touch of scorn:—"A pretty occupation for a Highland gentleman!"

"Well, Mary," said Kathchen, reflectively. "I confess that story does not sound to me true. I should like to have some proof before believing it. No doubt it is just possible he may have wanted to make up to these poor people for Mr. Purdie having banished the illicit stills; and perhaps he could not afford to get them spirits for nothing; and so he may charge them what he himself has paid. But it is not like what a Highland laird would do, however poor he might be—and in a kind of way he still stands in the position of laird toward these people. No, it does not sound probable; but anyhow I mean to find out—if we are going along to-day to thank the old woman for her kindness of last night. And whether it was poaching, or smuggling, or whatever it was, that took young Mr. Ross up to that hut, it was a very lucky thing for us; we should never have seen the morning if we had been left there."

"That is true enough," Mary admitted; but then she went on to say, with some asperity:—"At the same time, a favor is twice a favor when it is graciously conferred. He seemed to me a most ill-mannered young man. I doubt whether he would have come near us at all if he had known who we were."

"Oh, I don't agree with you—not in the least!" said Kathchen, warmly. "I thought he was most courteous, and—and respectful. Remember, we were entirely strangers to him. And just think of his going all the way to Lochgarra to get the carriage sent for us—and very quickly he must have done it, too."

But Mary had not a word in favor of this young man whom she suspected of far worse offences (in her eyes) than killing salmon or bringing smuggled brandy into the district; she suspected him, in truth, of stirring up wrath and ill-will, and setting these people against her.

"I suppose," she said, rather coldly, "we must thank him, if we should see him."

"I, for one, mean to do so, and very heartily," Kathchen said at once. "I think he was most kind and considerate—if—if a little—a little reserved. And not at all the wild savage I had expected—most distinguished looking, I should call him——"

"Come away down to breakfast, Kathchen," said Mary, taking her friend by the arm; she would hear no more on that subject.

In the hall they encountered the little Highland lass who had been their guide on the previous night; and she, looking up with timid eyes toward this tall and beautiful lady whose smile was so gracious and winning, said:—

"Am I to be going home now?"

"Home?" said Mary. "Have you had your breakfast?"

"Oh, yes, indeed."

"Very well, you need not go yet; you may as well wait and come with us in the carriage—for we want to thank your grandmother for her kindness to us. You can amuse yourself in the garden, if you like, until we are ready."

She was obediently going away, but Kathchen stopped her.

"I don't think you ever told us your name."

"Just Isabel," said the little maid, in her pretty fashion.

"Of course you know Mr. Ross?" was the next question.

"Oh, yes."

"What was he doing up at your cottage last night?"

"Kathchen!" said Mary; but the little girl did not notice the interruption; she answered quite simply,—

"He came up to ask about the cow."

"What cow?"

But here Isabel did begin to look a little frightened; and she glanced anxiously at Miss Stanley.

"Perhaps the lady will be angry—" she said, with shrinking eyes.

"Oh, no, she won't be angry," Kathchen interposed at once. "What about the cow? Tell me about the cow."

"It was my mother's cow that got into the bog and was drowned——"

"The bog we strayed into?" Kathchen exclaimed. "Do you mean to say that cattle have been swallowed up in that place?"

"Ay, many and many a one," said the little girl.

"I'll have it fenced around at once," said Mary, in her usual prompt and emphatic way, "no matter what it costs!"

"And the cow?" said Kathchen, encouragingly, to the little Highland lass. "Did Mr. Ross want to know about the cow?"

"Mr. Ross," continued Isabel, "he was sending a message that my mother would ask Mr. Purdie and the lady for a cow in place of that one, and the money to be paid back bit by bit as we could do it; yes, and Mr. Purdie was to be asked for the cow; and Mr. Ross he came up last night to see if we were to get the cow. But we were not hearing about it from any one."

Mary's face flushed with vexation.

"Why was I not told about this?" she said, turning indignantly to Kathchen. "What right had Mr. Purdie to decide—and go away without saying a word? I suppose he refused?—and that was to be all of it!"

But the little girl, hearing the lady talk in these altered tones, grew frightened; and tears started to her eyes.

"Please, I was not asking for the cow," she said, piteously; for she knew not what terrible mischief she had done. "I was not intending to make the lady angry——"

Mary turned to the girl, and put her hand in a kindly way on the raven black hair.

"Don't you be alarmed, Isabel," she said, with a reassuring smile. "You have done no harm; you were quite right to tell me the story. And you need not be afraid; your mother shall have the cow; perhaps even two of them, if the byre is big enough. Now go into the garden and amuse yourself, until you hear the carriage come round."

However, it may here be said that in this instance Mr. Purdie was in no wise culpable. It appeared that the widow MacVean had two days before gone over to Cruagan, where she had a married daughter, in order to help in the fields; and her only chance of presenting the petition was by intercepting the factor on his way homeward. Whether she did or did not present the petition was of no immediate consequence; Mary had resolved upon offering up this cow, or perhaps even two cows, as a sort of sacrificial thanksgiving for her deliverance from the Meall-na-Fearn bog.

After breakfast they set out, Isabel seated beside the driver. And once again they came in sight of the Minard township, with its poor little crofts on the rocky soil, and the long sweep of white sand where, the tide being out, the people were busy with their sickles cutting the seaweed from the rocks.

"I wonder," said Mary, meditatively, "if I couldn't revive the kelp-burning?"

"Oh, no," said Kathchen (who did not quite understand how indefatigable the young proprietress had been in qualifying herself for her new position). "That is all over now. Those were the grand days for the Highlands—for both the landlords and the people; but modern chemistry has spoiled all that."

"You don't know, then," said Mary, quietly, "that kelp-burning is carried on in some places at this moment? It is, though. Over in South Uist the crofters get from 2 pounds 10 shillings to 3 pounds a ton for kelp. But perhaps they need all the seaweed they can get here for their crofts, or perhaps it isn't the right kind of tangle; I must find out about that."

They drove as far as they could along the road; and then they had to descend from the carriage to make the rest of their way on foot.

Mary turned to the old grandmother, who was talking to Kathchen with such English as she could muster.

"Yes," she was saying, "my daughter, she over at Cruagan——"

"And so, perhaps, she did not speak to Mr. Purdie about the cow?" Mary interposed. "Very well. That's all right. Little Isabel was telling me about the cow that was lost. Well, I will see that you have one in its place."

The old woman could not speak; the withered, weather wrinkled face wore a pained look, as if she were trying not to cry; and she furtively wiped her hand on her apron and timidly held it out—it was by shaking hands that she could best express her thanks. And here was an extraordinary thing!—here was actual gratitude, the very first symptom of it that Mary Stanley had encountered since she came to the place. But the next moment she was saying to herself bitterly:—

"Why? Why is this old woman friendly? Because she saw that Mr. Ross of Heimra condescended to be civil to me yesterday evening. If he throws a word to me, then I am to be tolerated! But if I had come here by myself I might have offered to double the size of her byre and give her two cows instead of one, and there would have been nothing but sullen looks and silence. Was I not warned the moment I set foot in the place? It's Donald Ross of Heimra who is their Laird. I am a stranger and an enemy."

And now it was Kate Glendinning's turn to make a few discreet inquiries; for the allegation that a Highland gentleman would condescend to sale and barter was still rankling in her soul.

"Well, Mrs. MacVean," said she pleasantly, "that was very excellent brandy you gave us last night, and very welcome, too; I suppose we should have died of the cold and wet if you had not given us the hot drink. But where did you get brandy in an out of the world place like this?"

An alarmed expression came into the old woman's face, though she endeavored to conceal it. She looked away down the hill side and said, vaguely:—

"It was—in the house. Oh, ay—in the house."

"Yes; but where did you get it?" Kate asked.

There was a moment of silence—and distress.

"The brandy?—Mr. Ross—he ordered me to give it to you."

"Oh yes," said the young lady, in the same off-hand sort of way, "it was very thoughtful of him—and very kind of you. It seemed to bring us back to life again. I don't know what we should have done without it. I was only wondering where you got such good brandy in this part of the Highlands."

The old woman looked anxiously from one to the other—were they trying to entrap her?—even after their generous promise that she should have the cow.

"Oh, ay," she said, still clinging desperately to those evasive phrases, "the brandy—it in the house—

"DON'T YOU HAVE ANYTHING TO WORK AT?" SHE SAID.

and—and Mr. Ross, he ordering me to give it—and any one very pleased, whatever he wishes. And the ladies—very, very wet and cold—and a long weh home to Lochgarra——"

"Come, come Mrs. MacVean," Kathchen said, "you ought to know that we don't want to make any trouble—is it likely, just after Miss Stanley has promised to give you the cow? I am asking only out of curiosity; and I can keep a secret as well as any one. And of course we are quite aware that it is Mr. Ross who brings the brandy into the neighborhood—and very properly, too, for good brandy is better than bad whiskey, and you must have something in the house in case of sickness. Very well, tell me what he charges you for it."

"Charges?" the old woman repeated, with a puzzled air.

"Yes," said Kathchen, encouragingly. "I only want to know for—for information; and I am not likely to tell any one. What do you pay him for it?"

Then the old grandmother understood; and though she did not say much, there was something in her tone that showed how keenly she resented this imputation.

"Pay—Mr. Ross of Heimra—for the brandy?" said she, as if it was herself who had been insulted; and she was turning angrily away. "You think—the young master—tekkin money from the like of me?"

"Then he gives you the brandy for nothing?" said Kate—and this question at once arrested the old dame, who made answer somewhat sulkily—

"I not saying that—I not saying that at ahl."

"Of course not," said Kathchen, with cheerful good humor. "It is not necessary for you to say anything. But now I understand; and I am very glad of it; for I have Highland blood in my veins myself, and I did not like to think of a Highland gentleman taking money for little kindnesses of that sort. And indeed I did not believe it; and I am very pleased indeed that you have made it possible for me to contradict such a ridiculous story."

Shortly thereafter—the old grandmother having been won into something of a more conciliatory mood by reiterated expressions of thanks and a circumstantial promise with regard to the cow—the two young women left; and as they descended the hill, Kate Glendinning was most triumphant about this refutation of what she considered a malignant slander. Mary, on the other hand, was inclined to be coldly severe in her judgment wherever young Ross of Heimra was concerned—though neither coldness nor severity formed part of her ordinary temperament.

"I don't see anything to be proud of, Kathchen," said she. "He is cheating the revenue, for one thing."

"Cheating the revenue," said Kathchen, in her matter-of-fact way, "is not likely to trouble a Highlander's conscience much. But I daresay he thinks the Government can get along well enough without taking any more taxation from these poor people; and I have no doubt he says to himself that if he pays for a bottle of good brandy for some poor woman with ague or rheumatism in her old joints, the Government can afford to let her have it without the duty. In a climate like this you must have spirits of some kind; and as I was saying to Mrs. MacVean, good brandy is better than bad whiskey filled with fusel oil."

"I know perfectly well what his object is," Mary said, proudly and indignantly. "His object is simply to steal away the hearts of the people—and to stir up ill-will between them and whoever happens to be at Lochgarra House. They are all his friends—and my enemies. He can shoot and fish wherever he pleases; he has the run of the whole estate; he is welcome at every fireside; whilst I, when I want to lower the rents, and better the condition of the people in every way, and be their friend—well, I am kept outside at the door, and if I say 'Am I welcome?' there is no answer. For him—everything; for me—nothing. And I think it is hardly fair."

She spoke in a proud and hurt way, and her lips trembled for an instant; it was clear that she considered she had not deserved this ill usage.

"No, no, no, Mary," her friend protested. "You are unjust, as far as Mr. Ross is concerned anyway. For one thing it is very likely that the poor people about here were accustomed to look to his mother for little comforts when they fell ill, and he may be trying to carry out the same kind of thing, in the only way that would occur to a man." Then a demure smile came into Kathchen's eyes. "But I will be honest with you, Mary. I don't think it is done to spite you at all, although your family have wrought him and his sufficient wrong. But if you were to ask me if it wasn't done with a determination to spite Mr. Purdie—in return for the destruction of the illicit stills—well, you see, people may act from various motives, and I shouldn't be surprised if that had something to do with it. As for stealing the hearts of the people—if you knew the curious loyalty and devotion of the Highlanders toward certain of the old families, you would hardly think it necessary that Mr. Ross should have to make use of any bribe——"

"But why should they hate me?" Mary exclaimed—and Kathchen had no answer.

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"Don't you have anything to work at?" Mary said to the tall and rather good looking young fellow who was standing looking on at the women and girls gathering the sea tangle.

"My father has a croft," he made answer, in a listless way.

"But wouldn't you," she said, in a very gentle and hesitating manner, so as not to seem impertinent, "wouldn't you rather go away and find some work for yourself?"

"Aw, well, I was at Glasgow, and I was getting twenty shillings a week there."

"And you did not stay?"

"Well, I could not live there," he said, simply enough. "It is no use getting twenty shillings a week if you cannot live in a place, and in a few years I would be dead if I was living in Glasgow. I am better to be alive here than dead in Glasgow."

"Then perhaps you could go to the east coast fishing?" she suggested.

"No, I am not going there now. I was there one or two years, but it did not pay me."

"And don't you do anything?" she asked again.

"Well, in January I am in the Naval Reserve."

"And the rest of the year you don't do anything?"

"Well, my father has a croft"—and that was about all the information she could extract from him.

As a final effort she said to him timidly:—

"If I were to try to get you a boat and nets from the government, would it be of service to you?"

"It would need eight of a crew," said he, with an obvious lack of interest, "and I would not be knowing where to find them."

However, a great surprise was in store for her; before getting back to Lochgarra on this occasion she actually encountered a human being who received her proffered friendliness and good will with cheerful and unhesitating gratitude and responded with a frank comradeship that quite won her heart. It is true the man was drunk, but at first she did not perceive that; and indeed she was ready to make ample allowances in her eager desire to establish pleasant relations with anybody, after the disheartening coldness she had just experienced at Minard. This man whom she and Kathchen overtook on their homeward way was a huge, lumbering, heavy shouldered giant, with a prodigious brown beard and thick eyebrows, whose deep set gray eyes (though a little bemused) looked at once intelligent and amiable. On his shoulder he had hoisted a rough wooden box, and as he trudged along he smoked a small black clay pipe.

"Good day to you!" said Mary to the giant.

"Aw, good deh, good deh, mem!" said he, with a broad grin of welcome, and he instantly put the pipe in his pocket.

"That is a heavy box you are carrying," said she; "I wish I were driving, and I would take it along for you."

"Aw, it's glad I am I hef something to carry," said he, in a strong Argyllshire accent, "and I wass thinking that mebbe Miss Stanley herself would be for tekkin a lobster or two from me, for the house. Aw, I'll not be charging Miss Stanley much for them—no, nor anything at ahl, if Miss Stanley would be for tekkin a lobster or two from me——"

"Oh, these are lobsters?" said she, with the most friendly interest.

"Ay, chist that," said the giant.

"And you will be sending them away by the mail cart?" she asked.

"Ay, chist that—it's to London I am sending them."

"Oh, really," she said. "All the way to London? Well, now, I wonder if you would think me inquisitive or impertinent if I asked you how much you get for them?"

"How much? Aw, chist two-and-sixpence the dissen," said he, in a good natured fashion, as if he hardly expected to get anything.

But Mary was most indignant.

"What?" she said. "Two-and-sixpence the dozen? It's monstrous! Why, it's downright robbery! I will write to the London papers. Two-and-sixpence a dozen—and a single lobster selling in London for eighteen pence or two shillings, and that a small one, too. Isn't it too bad, Katchen? I will write to the newspapers—I will not allow such robbery."

"It is a long weh of communication," said the big, heavy shouldered, good naturel looking man. "And Mr. Corstorphine, he paying ahl the carriage, and sending me the boxes."

"I will get you twice as much as that for the lobsters," said Mary, with decision, "if I sell them among my own friends. I will guarantee you twice as much as that, and I will pay the carriage and get you the boxes. What is your name?"

"Archie MacNicol, mem," said he; but the whiskey had made him talkative, and he went on:—"I am from Tarbert on Loch Fyne; I am not from among these people here at ahl. These people, they are not proper fishermen—aw, they are afraid of the sea—they will not go far out—I hef seen the East Coast men coming along here and tekkin the herring from under their very eyes. There is one of the government boats that they got; and it is not paid for yet; and it is lying half covered with sand at Achnacross, and no one using it at ahl. Ay, and the curers willing to give elevenpence a piece for ling. Ay, and I wass into Loch Hourn, and I got fifty crans of herring, and I wass curing them myself."

"But wait a moment," said Mary, to whom this information seemed a little confused. "If you are not tired, won't you keep on your way to the village, and we will talk with you? You see, I am anxious to get all the information I can about this place, and the people here don't seem to be very communicative—although it is altogether in their own interests that I should like to make inquiries. But they appear to be afraid of me—or there is some quarrel, or ill will, that I don't understand——"

"A quarrel with Miss Stanley!" said the lobster fisherman, deprecatingly—for he was in a mellow and generous mood. "No, no—he would be a foolish man that would be saying that!"

"Very well," said Mary, as they were all three going on to the village, "tell me about your own circumstances. I want to know how I can be of help to the people about here. I have not come to Lochgarra to raise rents and collect money and take it away and spend it in London. I want to live here—if the people will let me; but I don't want to live among continuous enmity and ill will."

"Aw, yes, yes, to be sure, to be sure now!" said Archie, in the most amiable way, and Mary was entirely grateful to him for his sympathy—it was so unexpected.

"Tell me about your own circumstances," she went on. "Is there anything I can do for you and the other lobster fishermen?"

"Aw, Cosh!" he cried (but it was the whiskey that was responsible—Archie himself meant to be most polite). "Would Miss Stanley be doing this for us now—would she be writing a letter for us to the Fishery Board?"

"Oh, certainly," she answered with promptitude, "if that will be of any service to you. What about?"

And here Big Archie (Gilleasbuig Mor, as they called him) in his eagerness to tell his tale, stopped short and deposited the lobster box in the road.

"It's this way now—that there will be many a broken head before long if something is not done. For they are coming from ahl quarters to the lobster fishing—stranchers that hef no business here at ahl; and they are building huts; and where there is a hut there will soon be a house; and it does not require the wise man of Mull to tell any one of the truth of that. Yes, and they will be saying they hef the right from the Fishery Board; but as I am thinking that is nothing but lies; for how can the Fishery Board give stranchers the right to come here and build huts on the crofts above the shore—ay, and going on, and paying no rent, either to Miss Stanley, or the crofter, or to any one? And Gillie Clotach and me, ay, and two or three of the young lads, we were saying we would tek sticks and stones, and drive them into the sea—ay, though there might be a bluidy nawse here or there; and others would be saying no, that it was daucherous to do anything against the Fishery Board. And would Miss Stanley be for sending a letter to the Board, to ask if it is lies those people are telling us, and whether they can come and build a hut whenever they like?"

"Certainly I will," said she. "Only, there is to be no fighting and bloodshed, mind. Of course, the space occupied by a hut is a very trifling matter—I suppose what you really object to is those strangers coming to your lobster ground?"

"Ay, chist that!" said Big Archie, eagerly.

"Very well. It seems to me quite absurd to think that the Fishery Board should have given any one the right to build huts; however, I will inquire; and then, if I get the answer I expect, you must go peaceably and quietly to those people, and tell them they are mistaken, that they have no right from the Fishery Board or from any one else, and that they must leave—"

"Evictions," said Kathchen, under her breath; she saw trouble coming.

"Quite peaceably and quietly, you understand," Mary continued; "there must be no broken heads or anything of that kind; you must tell the people what the Fishery Board says, and then they will see that they are bound to go."

"Ay, ay, chist whatever Miss Stanley pleases," said Big Archie; and therewith he shouldered the heavy lobster box again and resumed his patient trudge, while he proceeded to give Miss Stanley some further information about those marauding fishermen and their evil ways.

But when they were nearing Lochgarra, Mary, who had been rather silent and abstracted for some little time back, said to him:—

"I suppose you have a boat, Mr. MacNicol?"

"Aw, ay, and a fine boat too," said Archie. "And if Miss Stanley herself would be wishing for a sail, I would bring the boat round from Camus Bheag."

"That is what I have just been thinking of," Mary said—they were now coming in sight of the sea, and she was absently looking out toward the horizon.

"Ay chist any time that Miss Stanley pleases, and I will not be charging anything," said the good natured giant with the friendly (and bemused) eyes. "Aw, naw, there would be no charge at ahl—but chist a gless of whiskey when we come ashore."

"Oh, I must pay you for your time, of course," said she, briefly. "I suppose you could bring your boat round this evening so that my friend and myself might start pretty early to-morrow morning? We should be ready by ten."

Katchen turned wondering eyes upon her.

"But where are you going, Mamie?"

"I am going out to Heimra Island," she said.

[CONTINUED NEXT SUNDAY.]

REBECCA'S REMORSE

BY JAMES PAYN.

IT IS not unusual with young men of philanthropic or religious instincts to seek their work, on taking orders, in the East End of London, and to turn their backs upon fashionable congregations and gift slippers; and yet those "angels of fiction," as they have been termed, the doctors, are never credited with the same self-sacrificing motives. No medical man is ever described as preferring a poor neighborhood to a rich one; he goes to Bayswater if he can't get to Belgravia, and to Bloomsbury if he can't get to Bayswater, but further east than Bloomsbury he is not found—in fiction.

There really are doctors in the East End of London, and I once had a practice there myself.

It was not a good one in point of remuneration, but there were plenty of patients; the sort of "practice" that makes one "perfect" from a professional point of view; and at the same time absolves one from the income tax. I confess, however, that I did not make this choice of my own free will. "Not grace, nor zeal," but a quarrel with my respected uncle, on whom I was entirely dependent, had been the cause of it. I had, I admit, considerably exceeded my allowance at college, and that my hospital career in London had been expensive, but his conduct in buying a practice for me in the East instead of the West as a punishment for what he did not hesitate to term my reckless extravagance was, I think it will be admitted, vindictive. He made me, however, an allowance, which, though one would have called it moderate in a more fashionable locality, was ample enough for such a neighborhood.

This enforced economy had, however, one very pleasant side to it. I generally found myself with money in my pocket, a most unusual experience with an East End doctor. There is nothing more distressing to him—if he is a good fellow, or even if he has a human heart in his breast—than the knowledge that half the patients who come under his care are not so much in need of medicine as of the necessaries of life, with which he is unable to supply them. No one knows what poverty is who has not seen "the East End" during a bad time.

People talk of "genteel poverty" as being the worst sort of it, but, at the risk of being thought material and commonplace, I venture to remark that abject poverty—the halfpenny worth of bread and the sack instead of a bed on the floor—is much more hard to bear.

My introduction to Star court was owed to Rebecca Bent, who called upon me one warm evening in August to ask for medical advice. I had seen her before, for she had been charwoman for a few weeks at the little house I occupied when one of my two domestics was away. I remembered her because she had worked so hard ("like a horse" my cook had said) during that temporary engagement and given much greater satisfaction than charwomen usually do. Otherwise there was nothing about her to enlist the memory. She was not young—five and forty, one would say, at least, and she had not even the remains of good looks.

"Well, Rebecca, nothing gone wrong, I hope," I said cheerfully. "You look all right."

"Appearances are deceitful, sir, Heaven knows," she answered, with what seemed for so trite a proverb a most unnecessary significance. "It's weakness so that one cannot lift one's hand to one's head, and thirst so that one wants a bucketful, and a cough that seems to tear one inside out, and besides that there's fever."

"So bad as that, is it?"

I made the usual examination. Her pulse was all right, her tongue quite a pleasure to look at, as compared with most of those organs submitted to my inspection (especially that most common variety, the drunken tongue); she had not coughed at all throughout the ordeal and there was not a trace of fever.

"You're nervous about yourself, my good woman," I said, "which in your case surprises me; you're too hard a worker to have such fancies."

"Still, them are the symptoms," she answered doggedly, "and I want a prescription." And she held out her hand, with eighteen pence in it. Such is not the fee in Wimpole street, but in the East End we are less exacting, and we have the same excuse for taking less as the barrister gave for taking half a crown instead of a guinea; it is often all our clients have in the world.

"I don't want your money, Rebecca, any more than you want my prescription," I said.

"For mercy's sake give it me," she cried, imploringly "it's not for me, sir; it's for my sister."

"For your sister? I did not know you had a sister. How is it possible for me to prescribe for a patient I have never seen?"

"She is ill, sir, deadly ill," she pleaded.

"The more reason I should see her."

"But she will not see you, sir; she made me promise that I would not bring you. She has seen no one but me for years. She's an invalid."

"Well, of course, and has an invalid's fancies, no doubt. Come, take me to her." And I took up my hat.

Then, to my amazement, the big, strong woman burst into tears. "Oh, sir, you don't understand," she sobbed. "She is not accustomed to be seen like this. You will break her heart."

"Pooh, pooh!" I said. "On the contrary, it is my business to mend it."

Not that I had the least belief in what she said, for, indeed, I began to think that her sister might be a *lusus naturæ*, of which I had seen more than one in my East End practice—poor creatures that were not good enough, or bad enough, for a show; two headed nightingales who had just missed their chance, as it were, by half a head; elephant men with imperfectly developed trunk. When poverty goes hand in hand with disfigurement it cannot close door and windows or hide in secluded "grounds," but still it will shrink from observation all it can, like some shy creature on the seashore whose shell is too small for it.

Seeing it was useless to argue with me, Rebecca led the way to Star Court. Dry, dusty, airless and without sunshine, because the tall black houses are huddled too close together, it was indeed a cheerless spot for the sound, far more for the sick to dwell in. A few ragged children were dancing in the centre of it round a barrel organ, to the superficial eye an example of how happiness is found in every spot, but well I knew that in more than one of these abodes lay women and children down with fever, to each of whom every note of the instrument was torture, but there was no liveried footman there to warn the unwelcome musician or policemen to bid him "Move on." The police in that neighborhood had their hands full of more serious matters. Up three flights of stairs we went, steep enough to suggest the aid of the banisters had they been less grimy and slimy, and then into an attic with a sloping roof.

At the first glance I thought a sunbeam had found its way there, but it was only a head of golden hair upon a coarse pillow. The face was turned to the wall, and Rebecca held her finger up, stained with toil and rough with work, to warn me that the invalid was sleeping. Why I noted the finger was because of the contrast it exhibited to the thin, white, delicate hand that lay outside the blanket, for counterpane there was none. There was a marriage ring on the hand, and it was the only article in the room which could have fetched a shilling at the pawnbroker's. There was a chair, but it had no back, and a deal table, one leg of which, much shorter than the others, was supplemented by a brick. Upon it stood a mug with wallflowers on it, the only decoration the apartment could boast. Yet all was scrupulously clean, down to the bare boards unrelieved by a shred of carpet. I had seen hundreds of homes before shorn of every comfort, but never one so cared for in its last extremity by hand and eye. Even the brick on which the table stood was washed and resembled one from a child's toy box.

"That is a good sign, her sleeping, is it not, sir?" whispered Rebecca eagerly. We had entered very softly, and doubtless the ear of the invalid had only caught the footstep she expected; but when her sister spoke she answered in faint, reproachful tones:—

"I am not asleep and you have broken your word, Rebecca."

"It was not my fault, my darling, indeed it wasn't; oh, did I not tell you, Doctor, how it would be?" and the great, gaunt woman wrung her hands distressfully.

"It was not your sister's fault that I am here," I interposed gently. "She would have had me believe that she came to consult me on her own account, but I saw through her. It was my duty to come, and it will be a pleasure to me if I can do you any good."

I had caught sight for a moment of the face of an angel, or rather, as it seemed to me, of one that was about to join the heavenly choir; but even while I was speaking she had put up both her hands before it. It was a poor protection, for they were so thin and fragile that one could almost see through them, but the gesture was eloquent enough.

"You need not be afraid of the doctor, my dear; he is not like any one else," said Rebecca, soothingly—a compliment evidently addressed to my profession and not to myself. "She'll come 'round after a bit, sir," she whispered, encouragingly, "but she has not seen a stranger—not to speak to—for years, and your coming is a terrible trial to her."

I nodded indifferently, as though such shyness was a common trait, for it is a point of honor with us doctors never to be surprised, but to say, "Just so," and incline the head at the angle of assent when a case is introduced to us, whether it be mumps or the leprosy. Moreover, I could have waited patiently for some time to get a glimpse of that face again. It was the face of a girl rather than of a young woman, though, paradoxical as this may seem, there was little of youth in it. The continuance of some distressing emotion or possibly of physical pain had, as it will do, driven youth away from it, and instead of "the vermeil hue of health" had given it an unnatural flush, as when autumn lays its fiery finger on the leaf in springtime; but the features were perfect, and the large blue eyes the most beautiful I had ever beheld. They had only expressed shrinking and affright at my presence, but it was easier to imagine them as the natural homes of love and tenderness. Around this picture, the beauty of which had something unearthly about it, or rather, as it struck my professional eye, was only to be for a short time on earth, that gleaming hair made a golden frame.

A greater contrast to her sister it was not possible for one woman to be to another. Presently she seemed to recover herself a little, and I ventured to put to her a few questions founded upon what Rebecca had told me. She answered them very gently, but in so indifferent a tone that they might well, as in her case, have had no personal application. This was a bad sign, for her disease was consumption, where if the patient is not as usual, sanguine, or has little interest in the result, the outlook is gloomy indeed. After recommending certain things which I simply said should be sent in, I took my leave. Rebecca followed me out of the room.

"She does not understand," she whispered, piteously. "You must not think her ungrateful, sir. Her mind—" she hesitated.

"Is fixed on other things than food and physic," I said smiling. "It is a common case with one so ill as she is."

"She is not dying, doctor?"

The woman's swarthy face grew pale and her eyes distended with sheer terror. I had seen relatives anxious about the fate of their dear ones, upon grounds the most momentous—spiritual considerations—but never one so moved as this one, and yet she did not strike me as being a religious woman. As a rule, the very poor take these matters with philosophy as well as they may. If there is another world (which they do not always believe) to which their invalid is going it naturally strikes them that it needs must be an improvement on the one he is leaving, and, at all events, there will be one less to feed and clothe. But, in the case of Rebecca, her emotion was infinitely deeper than mere anxiety or regret; it seemed to shake the very roots of her being.

"I do not say your sister is dying, my good woman," I replied: "my examination of her, as you know, has been very slight, but I confess that her condition impresses me unfavorably. She seems to be in very low spirits about herself."

"Heaven help her! well she may be," groaned Rebecca.

"And yet she does not seem alarmed as some do."

"Alarmed? What has she to be afraid of. It is others, like me, who have to be afraid. She has done no wrong; if there is a Heaven above she must needs go there."

"Well, that after all is the great thing and should give you comfort, for you will meet again."

"'Comfort, and 'meet again,'" she echoed, with a sort of contemptuous despair and, shaking her head, like one with the palsy, re-entered the sick room.

SHE STRETCHED FORTH HER ARMS TOWARD HER.

The whole situation amazed and perplexed me. On all other topics the woman was what one would have expected her to be. Save for a somewhat exceptional honesty, cleanliness and diligence, Rebecca Bent was like other charwomen; but in all that pertained to her sister she was tender and emotional to an extraordinary degree. I made inquiries about them without eliciting much information. They had lived in Star Court for nearly three years, but Rebecca alone was known to their fellow lodgers. Her sister had been always a recluse if not an invalid; she had never left her room; it was understood that she took in needlework when she could obtain employment, which was not often; but Rebecca was the breadwinner. She toiled early and late, but no one had heard a word of complaint from her. As a general rule it is not the hard workers who complain. It is not that they are resigned to their harsh fate, whatever cant may have to say about it; it is not in human nature to be that, but there is often a certain grim reticence about them, a not unjustifiable resentment. This was not the case with Rebecca, however. She had her reasons, as I afterward discovered, of liking work for its own sake. Work preserves us from thinking.

Gaunt and grim though she was now, for my part, strange to say, Rebecca interested me at least as much as my patient, notwithstanding her many advantages. Her beauty was of the kind that is heightened, rather than otherwise, by delicacy of constitution; even disease only rendered it more exquisite. It reminded me of the lily of the vale, "whom youth makes so fair and passion so frail that the light of its tremulous bells is seen through their pavilions of tender green," so transparent was its splendor. That she was dying I had now no doubt, nor could the end be far distant. The spectacle was very touching even to a professional eye, but what, I confess, lessened my sympathy for her was her conduct toward Rebecca. She seemed to take everything she did for her as a matter of course. It was quite true that she gave one the impression of belonging to quite another and a higher sphere of being, but to see her so self-conscious of it was deplorable. If she had been a princess she could hardly have been served not only with more devotion, but with more respectful reverence. I noticed in particular that though Rebecca lavished every term of endearment upon her sister she never addressed her by her Christian name, and I only discovered it to be Lucy by direct inquiry.

With the selfish egotism of the habitual invalid every doctor is familiar; but with Lucy Bent it was carried beyond all bounds. I had supplied her with various little luxuries and made arrangements by which during her illness her sister should not be under the necessity of leaving her, and for this she expressed herself—though I have reason to believe only at Rebecca's prompting—in a few sufficiently suitable words; if she had not uttered them I should have thought little of it. There was not much graciousness in Star Court, though in this case, where the casket was so fair, one naturally looked for the jewel, but the ignoring of her sister's claim to gratitude and the coldness—as it seemed to me the studied coldness—of her manner toward her was painful to witness. She never exchanged a word with her that was not absolutely necessary. Her state was such that it was impossible to remonstrate with her upon that or any other subject; indeed—and so far this was an excuse for her—she was so rapt in her own wretchedness, so given over to I knew not what of regretful and despairing memories, that she seemed to pay no attention even to her own condition, to the "body that did her such grievous wrong," or to the soul that was about to quit it.

Rebecca, on her side, was equally silent—dumb as the dog who, treated with indifference by some morose master, still waits on and watches him with patient devotion; but it was easy to see how she longed for a kind word or even a loving glance, and longed in vain. At last, when the end was very near, I could forbear no longer; it was a clergyman's business, perhaps, more than mine, but my patient had declined—and with no little vehemence for one so weak—to see a clergyman; and I took my courage (for, strange as it may seem, it needed courage) in both hands and spoke to her.

"Have you not one word, even of farewell, Lucy, for the sister who has nursed you so tenderly?"

There was a struggle within the panting bosom, added to the fight for breath, but the lips moved, and what they formed was the monosyllable "No." In the faint sound I recognized a distinct touch of bitterness.

"I know not what you have suffered," I went on, "and it may be (this struck me for the first time) even at her hands; but I know what she has suffered and is suffering now for your sake. Forgive her if she has done you wrong as you yourself hope to be forgiven. Look at her, it may be for the last time, and bid her kiss you."

Into the dying eyes, as she turned them on her sister, there came a look of ineffable sweetness, and she feebly stretched her arms toward her in invitation of an embrace.

Rebecca fell on her knees beside the wretched bed with a cry in which, for the moment, sorrow seemed to have been swallowed up in joy. To have been the witness of what followed would have been a sacrilege, and I left them together.

It may have been their first and last caress, for when I entered the room the next morning it had but one living tenant. The dead girl lay on the bed with her hands crossed ("as if praying dumbly") over her breast. The words of the poet occurred to me as I looked at her, but it was that line alone which had any application to her case. That she had not fallen, whatever sin she had committed (though she looked an angel) as Hood's unfortunate had done I felt certain. Her story was no common one of the street and the river. Everything that loving hands could do had been done for her to the very last service.

Rebecca was wonderfully calm and resigned, and after a few words of sympathy which perhaps had better not have been said, for I could see they tried her firmness, I spoke of what was necessary. Of course I took upon myself all the arrangements of the funeral, but I had to ask her a question about the death certificate.

"I do not know your sister's married name," I said.

"She was never married," was the unexpected reply.

My eye wandered interrogatively to the wedding ring upon that delicate finger, on which the needle had left no trace. It had, indeed, done little work of any kind. But Rebecca only shook her head.

"Then I will give your sister's maiden name Bent."

"She was not my sister, sir; she was no relative at all; put down Lester."

"No relative? Then, indeed, Rebecca, you may say you have done your duty to your neighbor."

"My duty!" she answered with bitter scorn, and throwing up her great gaunt hands. "It was I who murdered her."

It was not till some days afterward, when Lucy had been laid to rest in the cemetery, that I heard from Rebecca what she believed to be the story of her crime. It was exaggerated, emotional, and I am very sure represented the case only as it appeared to a mind full of remorse and self-reproach.

I prefer, for truth's sake as well as hers, to give the facts as they would have struck an unprejudiced observer.

Lucy Lester was the daughter of a tradesman well to do, and who made his money honestly enough, but he was a Puritan and of the strictest sect of the Pharisees. His wife had died when Lucy was still a child, and she was brought up in an atmosphere of gloom and dulness very unsuited to her character, which was at once frivolous and egotistic. Her beauty, of which she was only too conscious, was pronounced by the formal society with whom she mixed to be a snare (as, indeed, it proved to be), and every amusement to which she naturally inclined was sternly forbidden her. Rebecca, who had been her nurse and when she grew up became her maid, sympathized with her young mistress, to whom she was also genuinely attached, and made common cause with her against her persecutors, as she called them, though they included her parent himself. He was very thrifty and kept Lucy "short" as to pin money, and Rebecca, who, as she told me (for she spared herself in nothing), was "very greedy of gain," on a very low scale of wages. It was a sad and rather sordid story of severity and repression met by duplicity and intrigue. What redeemed it was the disinterested though exaggerated fealty of Rebecca, which would have borne comparison with that of feudal times. Except for her singular beauty there was nothing admirable in Lucy, who indeed was proud, selfish and exacting, but in Rebecca's eyes she was perfection and a martyr, fit for a prince, but with no choice of suitors save of a commonplace and unworthy kind, and who, never having seen a stage play, had no notion of the desirability of making a friend of the maid of their mistress.

Presently, however, a lover appeared of quite another stamp, but unhappily a clandestine lover. Mr. Power was one of her father's customers, a gentleman, as was understood, of good position, and who at all events gave large orders, which were punctually paid for. While calling on Mr. Lester on business he chanced to catch sight of Lucy, and became at once enamored of her beauty. Without the simplicity which is the safeguard of her sex, she was absolutely ignorant of that world with which she panted to mingle. The man's air of fashion made as much way with her as his protestations, and unfortunately the lavishness which a man of his stamp displays when bent on such a design was taken by Rebecca as the sign of a generous nature; without knowing them (as I think) to be exactly bribes, she took his bribes.

With one word to her master she could probably have saved his daughter, but she did not feel she was in danger. Even a word of warning to Lucy herself might not have been thrown away, but she did not give it. On the contrary, urged by many considerations—dislike of her master and his surroundings, willingness to please her darling and confidence in Power's professions—she assisted him to elope with her. I am afraid there was even a time when Lucy shrank from the audacity of that design, and but for Rebecca would have abandoned it; but it was because she was herself deceived. Indeed, at the last, when Lucy had lost her head as well as her heart and would have risked all for love, Rebecca stepped in, and insisted upon being present at the marriage ceremony. It was a barren precaution—though poor Lucy might afterward have used it as a weapon of revenge, if she had had the heart for revenge—for in a few weeks she discovered that he whom she had believed to be her husband was a married man. In that brief space she had lost all—fortune, friends and home, for her father closed his doors against her, and the unhappy girl found herself thrown on her own resources, which consisted only of a scanty wardrobe and a few jewels. Then, like a wounded tigress, she turned upon Rebecca with, "It is you who have been my ruin!"

The fury that might reasonably have been poured on her deceiver seemed quenched in the very catastrophe he had caused, as flame deserts the blackened ruin; so far as he was concerned, the crime of which she had been the victim was so overwhelming that in place of indignation she felt only wretchedness and despair; too weak to seek relief in self-destruction, she yet desired to hide herself from her fellow creatures and especially to be seen no more of men.

What remained to her of vitality took the form of passionate reproach of her late ally and assistant, and not a word did Rebecca say in her own defence.

Instead of leaving her young mistress to a fate only too easy to be foreseen she devoted herself with penitence and remorse to smooth the rough road she must needs travel for the future.

Effort of her own Lucy never made and accepted the other's services not only as her due, but as but a small instalment of the obligation she had incurred in having given her such bad advice. That she had not forgiven her she made very plain even (as has been shown) up to the last moment of her life, but Rebecca never thought herself hardly used.

"There was nothing I could do, as you may believe," she said, "that deserved thanks. It was owing to me that my poor dear mistress, so young, so beautiful, so tender, had fallen into the hands of a villain, and, unfit as she was to bear hardships, was compelled to live upon a crust. Was it to my credit that these hands, which had taken his bribes, provided the crust?"

If Miss Lucy had complained she said she could have better borne the consciousness of her crime, but after that first outbreak she kept silence—a cold, reproachful silence that for years had chilled the other's very heart. All she stipulated for was to be alone—not to be spoken to, not to be seen, and even when her illness had become severe it was only on Rebecca's promise to obtain professional advice without the doctor's presence that the sick girl had permitted her to apply to me.

This was the story of Rebecca's remorse.

I did what I could to reason with the poor woman by pointing out how penance atones for wrong, but if I had not been so fortunate as to obtain for her Lucy's deathbed forgiveness she would certainly never have forgiven herself. As it was she was in some degree comforted. I got her a situation in the country with some friends of mine where she was greatly esteemed and remained for years. She always took a day or two's holidays in the summer; no one knew where she spent it, for she had no friends; but at that same time whoever visited an East End cemetery would have found on Lucy Lester's grave fresh flowers.

MERCY FOR FRIENDLESS DOGS.

[From Forest and Stream.]

It will be remembered that some time since *Forest and Stream* suggested that the collection of homeless dogs in this city should be given in charge of the A. K. C. The HERALD has now advanced the idea, through Mr. Pelham Clinton, of delegating this important duty to the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals.

Of this plan we heartily approve, and in fact would welcome almost any change that would alter the existing state of affairs and do away with the political side of dog catching. That it is good policy to catch the dogs that roam our streets, or in other words, no one will gainsay, but this is not done under the present rule. There is no money enough in it, but rather seek they the dogs belonging to Madam or Mister, who may be expected to redeem the same. The way this part of the city's machinery is run is a disgrace to any civilized country.

Let us have a home for friendless dogs by all means, and let it be under the charge of those who are accustomed and prepared to deal with animals in distress. There are enough dog lovers in this city to amply support such a scheme, and now that a paper like the NEW YORK HERALD has taken hold of it no doubt something will soon be done to remove the present stain.